

ACTIVITY
REPORT
2022-2023



I belong!



*"Whatever the problem,
community is the answer"*

- MARGARET WHEATLEY

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Secrétariat aux relations
avec les Québécois
d'expression anglaise

Québec 



INTRODUCING 'I BELONG!'

In 2019, the Secrétariat aux relations avec les Québécois d'expression anglaise (SRQEA) conducted consultations with representatives from the English community across the province. Their findings were unsurprising: most English speakers (still) do not feel a strong sense of belonging to the province. To better understand why that is, and to try and bolster the community's sense of belonging, the SRQEA awarded project funding to six COM-Unity based organizations, including LEARN.

Through its involvement in the COM-Unity project, LEARN is helping young Quebecers in grade 5+ to actively reflect upon, express and shape their sense of belonging to Quebec society.

I Belong!

A LASTING LEGACY

Daniela Scoppa

In what can only be described as a transformational three years, LEARN is preparing to move on from its successful **'I Belong!'** project. Funded by the Secrétariat aux relations avec les Québécois d'expression anglaise (SRQEA), **'I Belong!'** offered project-based learning opportunities to English-language schools, empowering students to explore their identity and sense of belonging to Quebec society through the arts and acts of community service.

Launched in 2020, **'I Belong!'** was supported by the English Language Art Network's (ELAN) ArtEd team who worked alongside LEARN to identify teaching artists who could support five of the six project categories schools could choose from throughout the years: **Spoken Word, Digital Storytelling, Podcasting, Comic Zine, and Puppetry.** The sixth option, **Take Action**, with a focus on Community Service Learning (CSL), had students engage in a community service act that fostered a greater understanding of their communities and how they fit in as citizens.

Most projects took place in Community Learning Centre (CLC) schools, with the CLCs' Community Development Agents (CDAs) leading the charge and introducing **'I Belong!'** to the teachers and staff they work alongside, a strategy that worked well considering the overall number of participants. The culmination of **'I Belong!'** produced staggering statistics, with close to 4500 students across Quebec participating during its three-year run. "The **'I Belong!'** project was a really important response to the pandemic," said Ben Loomer, Project Coordinator for LEARN's Provincial Resource Team (PRT). "It was a chance to

bring artists into classrooms through Zoom and engage students by using their head, heart, and hands to make something while thinking about identity and belonging."

Sound artist and project lead for ELAN's ArtistsInspire Grants, Guillaume Jabbour, also facilitated the **Podcasting** option in the 2021-22 school year and notes that **'I Belong!'** made it acceptable for students to openly discuss their diverse backgrounds. "The identity based **'I Belong!'** pedagogy makes it okay for students to tell their stories, to be okay with who they are," he said. "The overall feedback ELAN has received about **'I Belong!'** is that students were incredibly motivated to take part in the options."

ARTISTS MAKING A DIFFERENCE

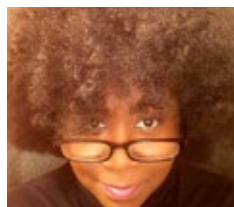
The backbone of most of the **'I Belong!'** options were supported by several talented Quebec-based artists including poets, professional puppeteers, comic artists, and multimedia journalists. The artists inspired students to create art that was reflective of their identity and of how they see themselves belonging in Quebec society, be it at home, at school, in a sport, with their friends, etc. In the 2022-23 school year, eight artists from ELAN participated in the **'I Belong!'** project.

This past school year, more than 200 students were involved in creating self-expressive **spoken word** pieces, guided by poets Jason "Blackbird" Selman, Liana Cusmano, and Deanna Smith. The poets' inspirational sessions resonated with the participants, with one Riverside School Board student remarking, "What I learned with Mr. Jason is that poems are not just sentences that rhyme. It is art with words. It is a type of writing where we can drop all our emotions on. It has deeper meaning than what it actually is."

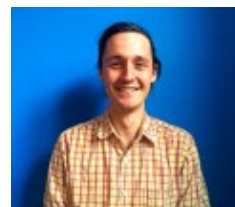
G. Scott MacLeod, a multimedia artist, art educator, and filmmaker, who has been working with students on the **Comic Zine** option since the inception of **'I Belong!'**, said this project has left its mark on him. MacLeod, along with



JASON "BLACKBIRD" SELMAN



DEANNA SMITH



DANIEL HICKIE



TINA TENNERIELLO



JAY D'ICI



LAURENCE DIONNE



G. SCOTT MACLEOD



GUILLAUME JABBOUR

PARTICIPATION FROM 2020 TO 2023



comic artists Laurence Dionne and Jay d'Ici shared their skills with hundreds of students, teaching them new art techniques while exploring the themes of identity and belonging. "I believe part of my function in **'I Belong!'** is to pass on my best practices and to bring joy in dark times," MacLeod said of his zine work. "This generation is coming up with a lot of darkness around them, a lot of negative stuff and media. We need beauty. We need storytelling. We need things that are going to make us feel good. **'I Belong!'** is a contributor to that and I think this could be a template for other schools far and wide."

The many artists who collaborated with thousands of students on these projects, guiding them through artistic experiences and getting them to dig deeper to find what belonging truly means, provided an invaluable experience for all who participated. "These artists get the students to open up and perform their stories using different artistic mediums," said Jabbour. "It's really powerful and important to have students connect to their identity in a way that will, hopefully, have a positive impact in the long run."

BRIDGING GENERATIONS AND CULTURES THROUGH COMIC ZINES

The **'I Belong!'** Comic Zine option is one that had more than 200 student participants during the 2022-23 school year. Students interviewed seniors and featured a life moment from the interviews in their zines, which are similar to comic books. MacLeod would teach students different

techniques during five weekly sessions and at the end of those sessions, the students presented their finished work to their peers, MacLeod, and their interviewees. "The most heartwarming and emotional part of this project is the students sharing their work with their grandparent or senior," reflected MacLeod. "It makes the seniors feel like they belong, and the students get a sense of their identity and where they're from."

Fifth grade teacher at St. Lambert Elementary (RSB), Patricia Dabis, had the opportunity to have her class of 25 students make zines with MacLeod. The project was so successful, her students asked her if they could do it again. "This whole idea of the **'I Belong!'** project was very rich and meaningful for them individually to reflect on how they belong and how the citizens we met, whether they were family members or not, how they belong in society," she said of the zine creation process.

Dabis's students had the opportunity to interview a grandparent or a senior in their community, a process facilitated by the school's CDA, Annie Beauregard, who set up the interviews with the community members. Julia, a student in Dabis's class, chose to spotlight her grandmother's life and enjoyed learning about her family's heritage. "My favourite part about the project was interviewing my grandmother because I was surprised to hear about how she came from Ireland when she was three years old and then she built this whole life for herself with many jobs and friends," said Julia. "It made me feel happy and like I'm excited for my life because I know that no matter what happens, I'll still belong."



We all have a place.”

Stephanie Jonker’s Grade five class had a different take on the **Comic Zine** option. Jonker, a teacher at Saint-Francis Elementary (ETSB), introduced her class to the book *Refugee*, by Alan Gratz, to teach her students about different countries. *Refugee* follows three teenagers as they flee from Nazi Germany, 1990s Cuba, and modern-day Syria.

As a tie-in to the book, Jonker had her students interview adult students in a Francisation class (facilitated by Saint-Francis Elementary CDA, Siu-Min Jim) who had recently arrived in Quebec from Mexico, Dominican Republic, and Guatemala. “The students had a hard time imagining what it would be like to move away,” said Jonker. “Most of the people they spoke to had to leave their families behind, so we discussed that feeling of not being able to see family all the time and being able to feel safe here, which also ties into *Refugee*.”

Jonker’s **Comic Zine** project was cross-curricular, starting in Jonker’s English Language Arts class with the study of *Refugee* while incorporating French because all the interviews were conducted in that language. The students also learned new techniques in Art when making their zines.

Dabis would highly recommend this project to her peers, noting that it is an enriching journey to take students on. “It’s really worthwhile to see the learning that happens over time,” Dabis said. “The learning curve that happened as the project went on was special because the students got to have those valuable conversations and then to see the final product at the end, which was a wonderful gift.”

POSITIVE ACTIONS THAT FOSTER A SENSE OF BELONGING

Throughout the three years of the ‘**I Belong!**’ project, 19 **Take Action** projects were completed, involving more than 670 students. The projects have included Gay-Straight Alliance clubs, Truth & Reconciliation initiatives, and community food drives. During the 2022-23 school year, over 200 students participated in **Take Action** activities that were rooted in Community Service Learning (CSL) and had students look at their communities through a critical lens, while building their sense of belonging by becoming active citizens and learners.

In addition to basing her **Comic Zine** project on the book *Refugee*, Jonker also wanted to have her 17 students understand what it means to belong to part of a global society. The students organized an awareness campaign and a school dance fundraiser for the Turkey-Syria earthquake that happened in early February 2023.

Using a hands-on approach, Jonker left the planning of the dance to her students, from figuring out what food would be served, to setting up the dance on the day of, to counting dance tickets and money raised. Jonker’s students also had to make kiosks where they explained their cause, gave facts about the countries and earthquakes, making the project cross-curricular as it connected to English Language Arts, Science, Geography, and Math.

But for Jonker, the project gave her students so much more than what the school curriculum offers. “We’re mak-

ing good citizens,” she said of the fundraiser that raised more than \$2,100 for Canadian Red Cross Turkey-Syria earthquake relief. “It’s really cool to see all those other skills that they’re developing. Some of those students who are struggling academically are really able to shine because they have other skills that aren’t always valued.”

“I teach English and History, but I love art and bringing that into the classroom, and then for the students to be able to show off what they’ve accomplished in a different way than the typical, ‘What did you get on your history exam?’ It shows that they are more than just marks on a page.”

Sayard Chartrand, teacher of Grade 10 alternative class
Chateauguy Valley Regional High School (NFSB)

Those sentiments are echoed by Sayard Chartrand, who teaches a Grade 10 alternative class at Chateauguy Valley Regional High School (NFSB). “I think it’s important for students to show their artistic side,” said Chartrand. “I teach English and History, but I love art and bringing that into the classroom, and then for the students to be able to show off what they’ve accomplished in a different way than the typical, ‘What did you get on your history exam?’ It shows that they are more than just marks on a page.”

Chartrand’s class of 12 students completed a **Take Action** project that had a different focus – what is the importance of an alternative education community for at-risk learners? The class conducted a research project to explore different models of alternative classroom communities, followed by interviewing former alternative students to get their view on how community shaped their lives, in and out of school.

Students then produced a creative writing piece and took photos that reflected their sense of belonging. The project culminated with them each making meaningful art about their journey in an alternative community on a ceiling tile in their classroom, leaving a piece of their identity behind while providing a service of beautifying a space in their school.

Chartrand said the results of the project were surprising. Her students felt disconnected from school before joining the alternative program and through this project, they really saw the impact it has had on them. “I had them reflect and acknowledge how important the program was to their success,” said Chartrand of their progress. “They felt it was

more than just a classroom and more than just classmates and a teacher. It became their community where they felt more at home than in their own homes.”

Jonker strongly urges teachers to incorporate more CSL projects into their lesson plans. “I feel like teachers get really caught up with how it’s going to fit with the curriculum and that is important, yes,” she said. “But I think everything else you get out of it is so important. At the end of the day what are the students going to remember? They’re not going to remember that third poem we read this week. They’re going to remember that we put on a dance, and they’ll remember where Turkey and Syria are.”

Chartrand is proud of how far her students have come and acknowledged that feeling a sense of belonging makes all the difference. Neveah, a student in Chartrand’s class, echoes the importance of community. “This program also lets you be yourself and my confidence has grown, because you’re with the same people all the time,” she wrote. “We built ourselves a little family, so you are all able to be yourself around each other and it’s like another home in a way to some people in the program. It has honestly done a lot for me both mentally and physically.”

A TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCE

As funding for the **‘I Belong!’** project comes to an end, Loomer reflects upon the last three years. “These types of projects are the ones students and teachers remember,” he said. “That sense of belonging in your community is important.”

The impact the project has had is evident in the many beautiful reflections written by the thousands of students who had the privilege of taking part in this exploratory process. Students across Quebec were able to examine their communities and consider what belonging and identity means to them. Samuelle, a Grade 5 student at Flemming Elementary School (ESSB) was one of more than 350 students who took part in the **Digital Storytelling** option in the 2022-23 school year.

Samuelle produced a digital story about her sense of belonging, saying that her family and friends make her feel loved, happy, important, and safe despite some disabilities she has. She notes that her disabilities do not make her different, they make her stronger, concluding her piece by saying, “Nobody should feel alone in this world. I know how that could feel sometimes. I wish everyone could feel that sense of belonging like I do.”



PROJECT AT A GLANCE

For the third school year in a row, LEARN offered English-language schools a chance to participate in a series of project-based learning opportunities that empower students to explore their identity and sense of belonging to Quebec society through the arts and acts of community service.

•1•

Puppetry

Students explore and express their identity and sense of belonging to their local communities by storytelling with puppets and everyday objects. The students' creative process is guided by professional puppeteers.

[COMPLETE ONLINE INFO](#)

•2•

Spoken Word

Students explore the relationship between identity and belonging as they witness performance pieces by artists from the Black, English-Speaking and LGBTQAI2+ communities of Quebec. Students had an opportunity to turn the lens inward as they developed literary or visual arts pieces of their own with support from a local artist.

[COMPLETE ONLINE INFO](#)

•4•

Digital Storytelling

Students explore what it means to them to belong to a community as they participate in a 6-week Digital Storytelling project, with support from digital media experts.

[COMPLETE ONLINE INFO](#)

•5•

Take Action

Students engage in a Community Service Learning project, where they plan, implement and reflect upon positive actions that foster a greater understanding and sense of belonging to their communities.

[COMPLETE ONLINE INFO](#)

•6•

Comic Zine Creation

Students interview English-speaking seniors from their community to learn more about some of the ways in which they've helped to shape Quebec society. Their stories form the basis for the creation of a comic zine, with guidance from professional comic book and multimedia artists.

[COMPLETE ONLINE INFO](#)

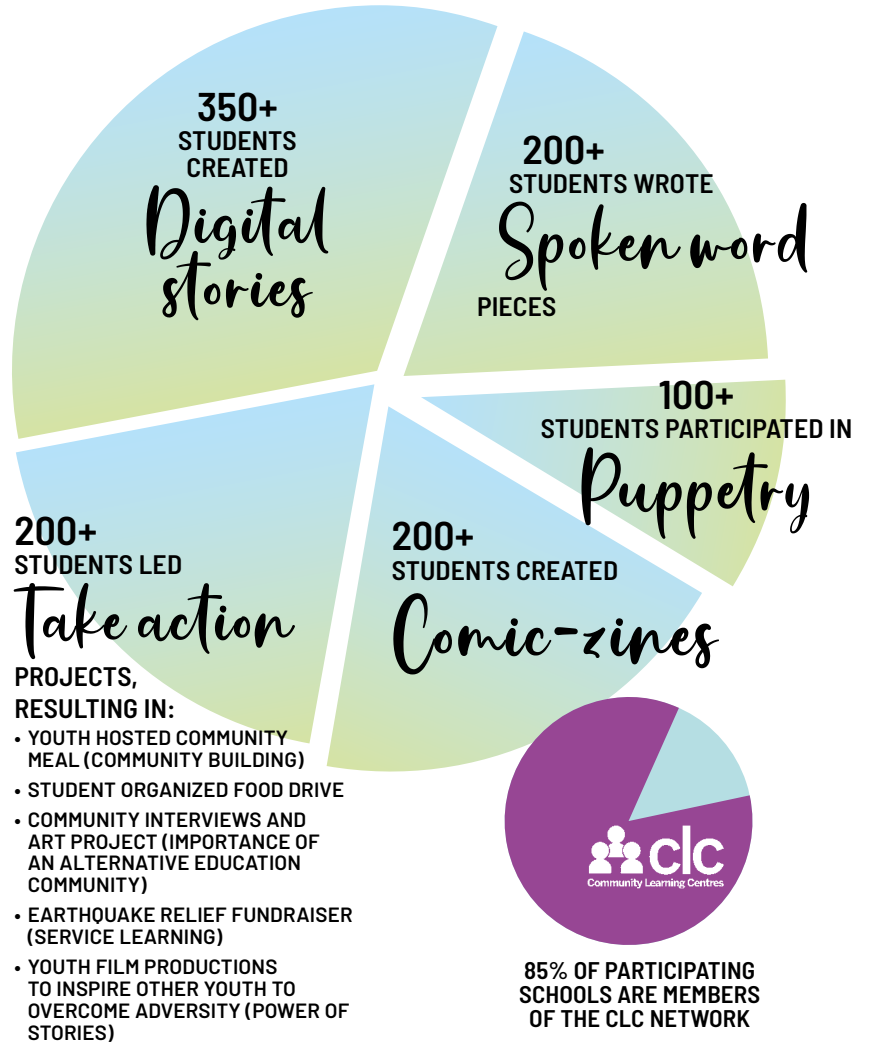
FACTS & FIGURES / 2022-2023

37 ENGLISH LANGUAGE SCHOOLS

58 CLASSROOMS

7 QUEBEC-BASED ARTISTS FROM ELAN

1 128 STUDENTS PARTICIPATED!



PROJECT RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS INCLUDED:

- Orientation sessions with LEARN
- One-pagers describing project steps and curriculum connections
- Question prompts for student reflection and discussion in elementary and high school contexts
- Note-taking template for students
- Grading rubrics (select options)
- Interview guide for students interviewing seniors (comic zine)
- Facilitated opportunities to showcase student work

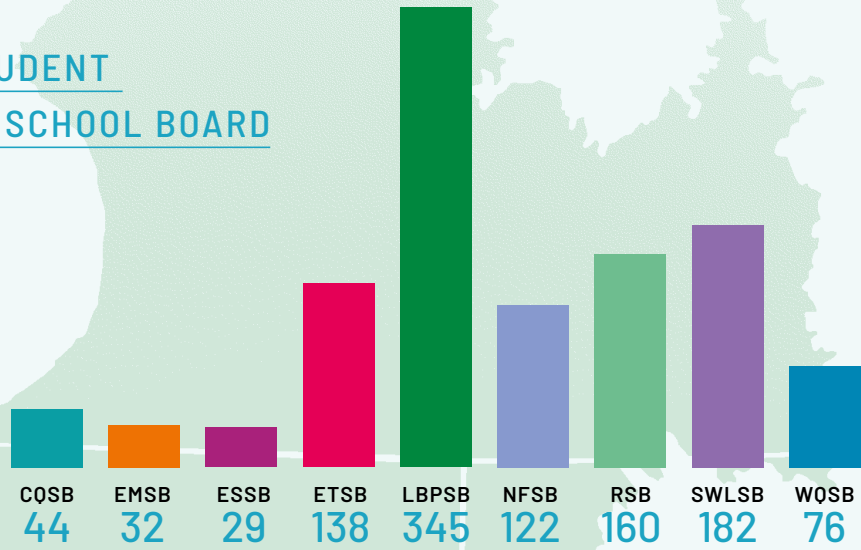
TAKE ACTION TEACHER TOOLKIT

Spoken word TEACHER'S GUIDE

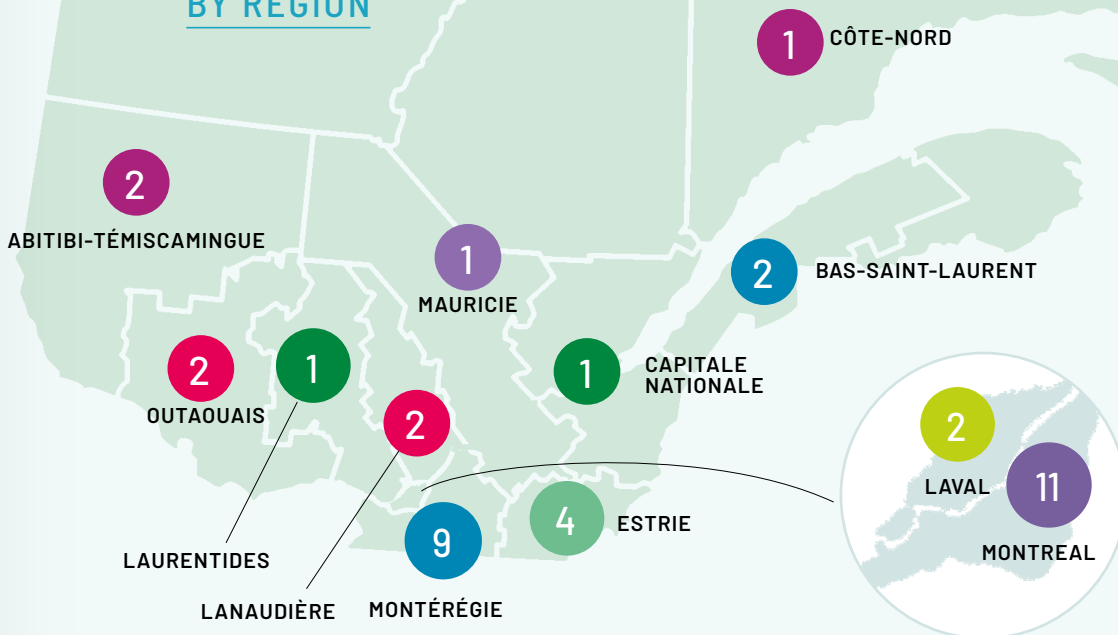
Think Big

PARTICIPATION RATE / 2022-2023

STUDENT BY SCHOOL BOARD



NUMBER OF SCHOOLS BY REGION



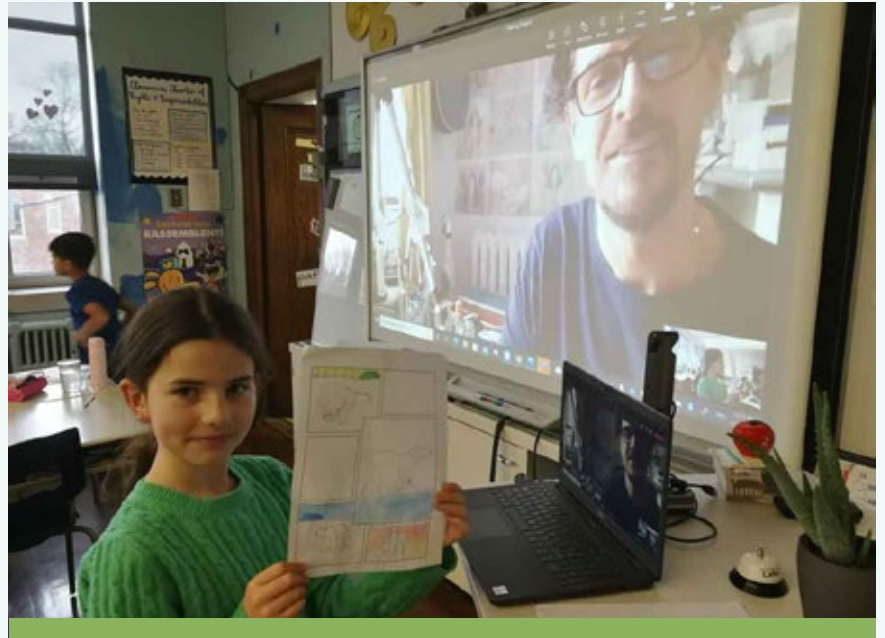
SOME PROJECTS 2022-2023

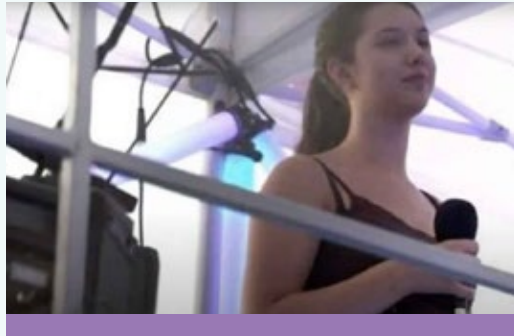
- SPOKEN WORD
- DIGITAL STORYTELLING
- COMIC ZINE
- PUPPETRY
- TAKE ACTION

[SEE ALL PROJECTS OF 22/23](#)

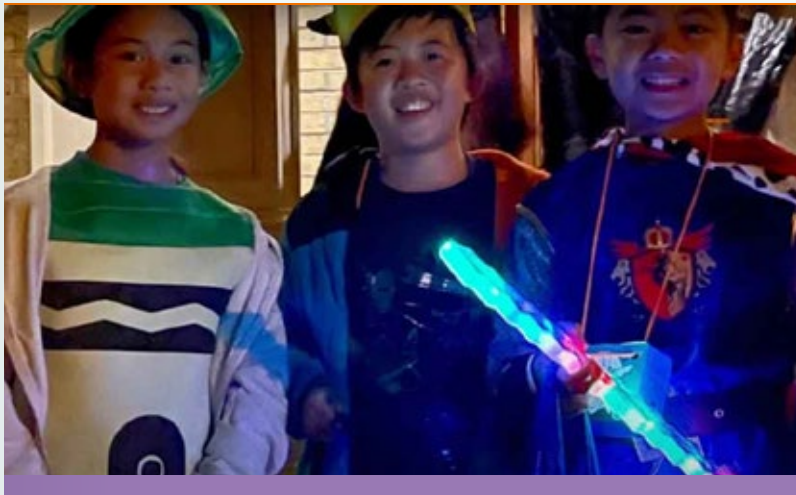
[SEE ALL PROJECTS OF 21/22](#)

[SEE ALL PROJECTS OF 20/21](#)





In my life I need **MORE** than just company I need to **MULTIPLY** people who actually cares about me. At the end it will **EQUAL** love. We need **LESS** negative energy in this world. We need to **ADD** more positive.
give more **Positive**
Matt





ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The 'I Belong!' project is funded by the Secrétariat aux relations avec les Québécois d'expression anglaise.

The project was additionally supported by ELAN's ArtEd team, who works with LEARN to identify featured artists and expand participation through the use of its Artists Inspire grants.

We would also like to thank Daniela Scoppa, who led interviews with participants and helped to draft this report.

The success of LEARN's 'I Belong' project wouldn't have been possible without the leadership of participating teachers, community development agents and featured artists.

Finally, a special thank you to participating students for reminding us of how powerful simple acts of kindness can be in fostering belonging and for having the courage to speak your truths - the fabric of our province is made more visible, and more beautiful, through your eyes.



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